

VZCZCXRO3692
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHDK #2703/01 3121801
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 081801Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY DAKAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6828
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0133

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 DAKAR 002703

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR CA A/S HARTY FROM AMBASSADOR
STATE ALSO FOR CA/P - DEBRA HEIEN AND PAMELA KOKAL AND AF/W

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OVIP](#) [CMGT](#) [SMIG](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KMCA](#) [SG](#)
SUBJECT: SENEGAL SCENESETTER FOR A/S HARTY

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) As the Mission and the Government of Senegal (GOS) prepare to host you, Senegal is preparing for presidential and parliamentary elections in February 2007. The Senegalese are proud to have a predominantly Muslim democracy that preaches tolerance and visibly supports the United States in promoting peace and combating terrorism. The GOS is seeking to enhance economic growth to reinforce its prospects at the polls. Growth has remained steady at five percent over the last decade, though there are signs of a slowdown in 2006. Despite high rates of poverty and illiteracy, Senegal retains a high degree of political stability and coherence thus enabling GOS to be a diplomatic player on a continent replete with conflicts. With U.S. training and assistance, Senegal has also become one of the world's top ten contributors of peacekeepers.

2. (SBU) Senegal aspires to become a more significant trading partner, but internal barriers to export-driven growth and continuing reliance upon foreign assistance have greatly retarded these hopes. This has resulted in mass illegal migration of Senegalese to the Canary Islands, a thorny issue for the GOS. The prospect of a successful Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) Compact offers a realistic potential for breaking with the past. Senegal must improve the investment climate and push forward more vigorously with reforms to strengthen its fragile judiciary that is lacking sufficient resources and often subject to external influences. In fact, the investigation and prosecution of leading politicians and journalists in 2005 and 2006 has tarnished Senegal's impressive human rights record. END SUMMARY.

AN IMPERFECT DEMOCRACY

3. (SBU) Senegal is at an interesting juncture in its post-independence history, six years through the seven-year tenure of President Abdoulaye Wade (pronounced &wahd8) and a few months away from presidential and parliamentary elections. He won an open, peaceful and highly competitive election in March 2000 due to a strong Senegalese national desire for change after nearly 40 years of Socialist Party governments. In fact, having raised expectations somewhat unrealistically, Wade has come under tough scrutiny and criticism for not having realized many of his campaign promises. He has recently undertaken major public works projects that he hopes will benefit him politically.

4. (SBU) Wade and his party, the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS), have benefited from Senegal's institutionalization of democratic values, respect for human rights, expansion of tolerance, advancement of women's rights, and freedom of

expression in all its forms. As a consequence, the standards by which the performance of his government is being measured are admittedly higher than those of his predecessors, a healthy sign that the large majority of Senegalese expect and demand democratic behavior from this government.

SENEGAL'S UNIQUE BRAND OF ISLAM

15. (SBU) Senegal is 95 percent Muslim, and it is instinctively resistant to religious extremism in general and Islamic fundamentalism in particular. One reason for this moderation is Senegal's distinctive and flexible interpretation of Islam. Another may be its geographic position at the western edge of the Islamic world. But perhaps the principal reason is the pervasive influence of the Sufi brotherhoods, homegrown societies that are hostile to external influences that they perceive as undercutting their own stature. The majority of Senegalese identify themselves with one of the four principal Brotherhoods (Tidjane, Mouride, Qu,adria and Layenne). Religious chiefs are called marabouts. Followers or talibes are expected to attach themselves to a marabout, and this allegiance is like a feeling for a father. In many ways the marabouts have replaced the traditional village chiefs. Politicians use these affiliations to advance their policies.

16. (SBU) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) issues diplomatic and official passports to marabouts as a courtesy.

When President Wade won elections in 2000, he initially required all marabouts to turn in their diplomatic and official passports and declared that he would restrict issuance of such passport in the future. Such attempts have failed and he has now approved issuance of far more diplomatic and official passports than the previous Presidents. As a result, Italy started requiring visas for

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diplomatic and official passports in December 2004, bringing it into alignment with most other European countries. In addition to issuing passports, the MFA also routinely issues diplomatic notes to marabouts, regardless of their status in the community. The issue of undocumented Senegalese in the U.S. is an important issue for khalifs who have talibes living there illegally. Even President Wade has raised the issue of undocumented Senegalese in the U.S.

SENEGAL'S ECONOMY: AN ACHILLES HEEL

17. (SBU) There is general economic stability, and GDP growth has averaged five percent annually for the last ten years, but is likely to fall to three percent in 2006. More than half the population lives in poverty; one-third to one-half have no reliable employment; the agricultural sector, which employs 60 percent of the population, is weak and unreliable; and most youth see emigration as a panacea, as shown by the recent flight of thousands of Senegalese to the Canary Islands. On a more positive note, Senegal graduated from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries program. In 2005 and 2006, the IMF and the World Bank forgave over USD 1 billion in multilateral debt, potentially freeing up over USD 80 million per year for poverty reduction. Despite these successes, the business environment remains difficult. Corruption is an issue, and while Wade has said the right things about combating it, members of his own family are often rumored to demand bribes and percentages of investments.

CLANDESTINE MIGRATION: SOCIAL ISSUE OF THE DAY

18. (U) Starting in mid-May, the flow of illegal African migrants landing on the shores of Spain's Canary Islands reached alarming levels. According to October press reports, over 27,000 illegal migrants, more than half of whom are Senegalese, have been detained by Spanish authorities. Of the 27,000, more than 4,000 migrants have been repatriated to Senegal. This has generated extensive press coverage by the local and international media and has become a priority for

the Government. On October 10, Senegalese Foreign Minister Cheikh Tidiane Gadio and his Spanish counterpart, Miguel Angel Moratinos, signed a framework agreement paving the way for legal immigration based on Spanish job market needs. Based on the agreement, Spain will provide Senegal with up to USD 19 million annually over five years.

¶9. Several other European countries and the European Commission have also donated funds and equipment to improve surveillance of the Senegalese coast and improve border enforcement. However, there is concern that repatriated and disgruntled Senegalese coupled with increased border enforcement could become a liability for President Wade during the February 2007 elections. There are reports that Wade's advisors are pushing to bring a halt to flights returning illegal Senegalese migrants from the Canaries.

SENEGAL'S FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES START IN NEIGHBORHOOD

¶10. (SBU) Senegal devotes major efforts to maintaining a modicum of stability on its borders. While politically Wade has worked hard to expand Senegal's role on the continent and in world affairs, his government actually expends real resources (financial, material and humanitarian) to its near neighbors. For example, Wade has been engaged in Guinea-Bissau since the September 2003 coup d'etat. Characteristic of Senegal's regional anxieties, Wade and his government continue to express great concern over the eventual transition in nearby Guinea in light of the failing health of its leader and the potential for disruptions there and a resulting influx of refugees to Senegal. Also, the sometimes erratic behavior of the recently re-elected Gambian President Jammeh, who rules the strategically located strip of land that juts into Senegal, raises Senegalese concerns over The Gambia's stability.

CASAMANCE CONFLICT

¶11. (SBU) Internal conflict in Senegal's southernmost region of the Casamance has regional security implications because it borders The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. Good progress has been made to lower the level of conflict thus easing border tensions; however, in the last several months, there has been an increase in fighting between factions of the Casamance separatist movement in southern Senegal and the Senegalese military, particularly in the northern part of the Ziguinchor region. Reports of banditry in the area have also increased. On September 1, an American was killed when her vehicle hit a newly placed mine on an unpaved road in this

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area. Senegal's Consular Information Sheet reflects this security problem. We continue to use our influence with GOS civilian and military institutions as well as with community representatives in the Casamance to achieve reconciliation and a lasting resolution to the conflict.

U.S. ASSISTANCE

¶12. (SBU) In addition to supporting the Casamance peace process, U.S. assistance to Senegal has focused on Muslim outreach, health, education, export promotion, promotion of women's rights, good governance and decentralization. Approximately 150 Peace Corps Volunteers are involved in health, education, natural resource management and micro-enterprise programs. Our model Muslim outreach program consists of assisting daaras (koranic schools), sending imams to the United States on International Visitor programs and donating Arabic- and English-language materials to Islamic schools and libraries. The proposed MCA Compact would more than double annual U.S. aid, building an industrial platform 25 miles east of Dakar to decongest the capital, create thousands of jobs in agro-industry and other sectors, and help GDP growth to reach eight percent per annum.

COMMITMENT TO REGIONAL SECURITY AND COOPERATION WITH U.S.

¶13. (SBU) Senegal has been a loyal partner and has served as an operational base for every U.S. deployment to the region. The GOS has supported the United States by deploying troops to the Gulf War, Bosnia, Haiti, Rwanda, the Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and, most recently, Sudan. Senegal was the first African nation to sign up for the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) (now the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA)) program that provides military assistance and training to African militaries with the capability of participating in peacekeeping operations, principally in Africa. ACOTA complements what remains the largest International Military Education and Training (IMET) program in Sub-Saharan Africa. This has paid major dividends through the engagement of Senegalese troops in their traditional areas of interest (Cote d'Ivoire) and in areas of traditional interest to us (Liberia).

THE U.S.-SENEGAL AGENDA

¶14. (SBU) For the U.S., Senegal represents our most important francophone partner in Africa. Perhaps not coincidentally, President Wade perceives himself as a good friend of President Bush. He basked in the glow of the President's visit in July 2003, his December 2004 visit to the White House, Secretary of State Rice and Secretary of Agriculture Johanns, July 2005 visits and invitations to two G-8 summits. For Senegal, the U.S. represents an attractive alternative to complete dependence on France. We also embody values that Wade would like to establish in Senegal, particularly economic ones. However, there is a realistic appreciation among knowledgeable Senegalese that the U.S. is not likely to supplant France as its principal partner any time in the foreseeable future.

¶15. (SBU) On terrorism, Senegal has been among the first African states to recognize the dangers posed to its own security by international terrorism. It has cooperated actively with the U.S. in the global war on terrorism, and Senegal has ratified 12 of the 13 key anti-terrorist conventions and protocols identified by the U.S. President Wade has also sent a set of draft laws to the Ministry of Interior that would expand the definition of terrorist acts and increase punishments for these acts. Senegal is also leading regional efforts to combat terrorist financing. Intelligence sharing and vigilance along Senegal's borders is good and continues to improve through well-established channels. We have raised our concerns with Senegal's leaders over the potential for unwanted influences from radical Muslim states, such as Iran.

¶16. (SBU) We continue to scrutinize Senegal's relationship with Iran, Libya, Venezuela and Cuba. Thus far, Senegal has done a good job in compartmentalizing and managing those relationships to ensure that they do not act to undermine Senegal's stability. We also continue to remind Senegal's leaders that too close an embrace will not be well understood nor well appreciated in Washington. Thus far, Wade has gotten the message. With respect to the situation in Iraq, Senegal has been more neutral than during the first Gulf War. (Senegal proudly provided troops to help evict Saddam from

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Kuwait.) Senegal resisted French pressure to take a more critical posture, and in fact Wade publicly noted his satisfaction that Saddam had been removed from power.

BOTTOM LINE

¶17. (SBU) Senegal under Wade is a good partner, very sympathetic to U.S. interests, and regularly seeking ways to deepen the relationship. Senegal is eager to receive critical Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) funding, and the GOS is eager to conclude its Compact in 2007.

Economically, Senegal continues to seek U.S. partners and participants to improve its economy, especially in agro-industry and transport. Bilateral relations are very warm and continue to deepen as we expand our areas of cooperation and seek additional sectors of mutual benefit. Senegal also carefully considers potential U.S. reactions to its particular foreign policy decisions, often responding favorably when we express our concerns, or when we seek GOS support. In sum, Senegal enjoys a close identification with the United States and many of our policies and values.

JACOBS